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SECRET SOCIETIES IN AMERICA.

BY W. S. HARWOOD.

THE membership of the secret fraternal orders of the United States in the month of December, 1896, was, in round numbers, 5,400,000. Taking the adult male population of the nation at the present time to be nineteen millions, and allowing that some men belong to more than one order, it will be seen that, broadly speaking, every fifth, or possibly every eighth, man you meet is identified with some fraternal organization, for the preservation of whose secrets he has given a solemn oath, a pledge more binding in its nature than perhaps any other known among men. In this vast number have not been included the many thousands who are members of the various labor organizations, though they, to a greater or lesser extent, are knit together by secret threads; nor about 500,000 members of the secret military orders, as the G. A. R.; nor has any account been taken of the many other thousands who are identified with the fraternities of the colleges.

Perhaps even more significant than the fact that there are so many millions of oath-bound men in the United States is the further fact that auxiliary to and a part of these orders are military branches, having at the present time about two hundred and fifty thousand members in the prime of life, who are trained in military tactics and who know the sword and musket manual as well as does the cleverest "regular," many of them thoroughly informed as to the history, the present needs, and the possibilities of military life.

Some of these organizations are of quite recent date. Indeed, since the closing of the War of the Rebellion there has been a remarkable increase in their number in this country. And in the last two decades, especially, there has been a strong growth. The beneficiary nature of some of the orders, combined with the

secret work and the fraternal element, has no doubt attracted many men to seek entrance.

It is far beyond reasonable computation to attempt to indicate the amount of money given by these fraternal orders in a single year in aid of their members. Many of the benefactions do not come into consideration in the making up of reports, and many are the result of purely fraternal generosity. Some idea, perhaps, may be gleaned from the formally announced amount which is given every year in benefits of one kind and another—money paid for caring for the sick, burying the dead, supporting the widows and orphans of deceased members, and in sums paid out to the widows of deceased members in the form of insurance.

These amounts range in size from ten to twenty thousands of dollars per annum, to seven million five hundred thousand for a single organization. Many of the organizations pay out over a million dollars per year in this way. While it is difficult to arrive at positive figures as to the amount which has been paid out by the fraternal orders in the United States since their establishment, yet, allowing for the amount paid out in the year 1896 and not included in the annual reports of the grand secretaries of the various bodies, the enormous total of \$475,000,000 has been given by these organizations in beneficences. It should be stated, also, that this is exclusive of the three larger orders, the Masonic, the Odd Fellows, and the Knights of Pythias. As nearly as can be computed these three orders have paid out in the same line one hundred and seventy-six millions more, making all told the vast sum of nearly six hundred and fifty millions of dollars.

A tabular statement follows, but it should be clearly understood that the amount of money recorded as paid out in benevolences by the various orders does not include the private monetary gifts of the members. Did it include these private beneficences the sum must be immensely augmented. It is impossible to ascertain the amount which is given in this personal manner, for the significant reason that it is all given for the aid of those who would scorn such aid were the fact made public that they were to be made the recipients of it. In the period between the years 1892-93, and the close of the year 1896, many men holding responsible positions were compelled to relinquish these positions because of the prevailing hard times, and during this period thousands, indeed, tens of thousands, of dollars have

been given by fellow-craftsmen to such of these unfortunates as were members of secret orders. It was not money given in charity, it was not a premium on mendicancy; it was not alms: it was the visible token of the greatheartedness which is one of the vital elements in fraternal life.

Take, for instance, one body, the Masonic, which may be considered typical of all. In connection with each lodge there is a relief committee whose duties are done with delicacy, whose acts are performed in tender and sympathetic secrecy. These committees ascertain the needs of those members who are facing hard fortune, aid them with money, with clothing, with provisions; or, if possible, secure positions for future bread-winning. No record is kept in any form for the public eye of these private beneficences. Indeed, in some cases, not even the names of the members of the committee itself are known to the other members of the lodge to which they belong.

So in all these orders there are like acts. The sum which the members of the fraternal orders give to such of their members as are in need would amount to several millions of dollars per year, were only one dollar *per capita* given; it is undoubtedly largely in excess of such an amount. There are large and well-equipped homes for orphans of deceased members, too, and for aged and indigent members, for which many thousands of dollars are expended annually.

The figures hereinafter given were secured by the writer in the month of December, 1896. In some instances the general secretaries of the organizations—from whom, in the main, the *data* were secured—estimated the membership and the revenue for several months past, dating from the annual meeting of the orders held in the summer or spring of 1896. The close contact of these officers with the subordinate lodges, the frequency of reports from the lodges and the intimate relationship between the general secretaries and the subordinate lodges give the general officers unusual avenues of information and make the figures practically complete to the month of January, 1897. It should be stated that, as there is no general grand lodge of the Masonic order, and as no reports are made from the lodges to any superior body, the amount of money contributed in public beneficences by this order has been in some measure estimated from the best general information obtainable.

Here is the table itself ;

Name of order.	Membership.	Amount paid in beneficences.
Masonic.....	750,000	\$90,000,000
Odd Fellows.....	810,000	74,600,000
Knights of Pythias.....	475,000	10,362,000
Ancient Order United Workmen.....	361,301	71,729,180
Royal Arcanum.....	189,161	38,206,422
Modern Woodmen of America.....	204,332	7,299,985
Knights and Ladies of Honor.....	85,000	12,000,000
United American Mechanics.....	56,000	3,000,000
Catholic Knights of America.....	26,000	7,007,133
Order United Friends.....	15,000	4,931,700
Benevolent Protective Order Elks.....	32,500	500,000
Equitable Aid Union.....	16,610	7,742,748
United Order Pilgrim Fathers.....	22,000	2,321,030
National Provident Union.....	6,300	1,293,450
Improved Order Red Men.....	165,000	14,200,000
Ancient Order Foresters.....	36,825	80,000,000
Royal Templars.....	16,800	4,573,025
Tribe of Ben Hur.....	11,294	49,250
Catholic Benevolent Union.....	45,250	7,031,481
Knights of the Maccabees.....	244,704	7,233,930
American Legion of Honor.....	52,100	33,672,676
Order Scottish Clans.....	4,000	575,000
National Union.....	47,791	7,539,948
Knights of the Golden Eagle.....	60,000	1,811,186
Ancient Order of Hibernians.....	98,000	*681,928
Order B'rith Abraham.....	11,735	1,121,500
Improved Order Heptasophs.....	31,118	2,114,000
B'nai B'rith, Improved.....	2,700	132,550
B'nai B'rith, Independent.....	34,925	43,175,000
Catholic Mutual Benefit Association.....	41,800	6,600,000
Order Chosen Friends.....	29,413	11,617,000
Ancient Order Druids.....	16,500	3,806,697
Foresters of America.....	140,575	4,795,291
Independent Order Foresters.....	110,000	4,070,000
Order Golden Chain.....	11,550	2,228,221
Royal Society Good Fellows.....	13,164	3,124,154
Home Circle.....	8,140	1,650,000
Independent Order Free Sons Israel.....	14,300	4,860,900
Irish Catholic Benevolent Union.....	16,500	2,750,000
Knights of Honor.....	118,287	62,009,200
Knights of Malta.....	17,600
Fraternal Mystic Circle.....	11,423	952,091
Knights of St. John and Malta.....	5,350	237,420
New England Order Protection.....	23,186	1,336,000
Independent Order Rechabites.....	3,520
Woodmen of the World.....	76,962	1,370,107
United Order of Odd Fellows (colored).....	130,350	†238,783
United American Mechanics, Junior Order.....	187,000	2,725,485
Order Sons of St. George.....	34,108
Masonic (colored).....	224,000
Sons of Temperance.....	25,474
Independent Order Good Templars.....	281,600
	5,454,329	\$649,082,471

* For last two years only. † For one year only.

Of course the table does not include anything of the expenditures of the orders for room rent, for uniforms, for banquets, for regalia, for lodge-room furnishings. There are about seventy thousand lodges in the United States, and, allowing them an average of fifty dollars per month for lodge-room rent—a low estimate, as many of the orders have expensive suites of rooms in great city buildings costing thousands of dollars in rental per annum—allowing but fifty dollars per month as the average throughout the towns and cities of the country, it will be seen that there is spent annually the sum of forty-two millions of dollars for the bare rental of lodge-rooms. The furnishings and decorations of some of the lodges are rare and costly. Many splendid buildings have been erected for lodge uses primarily, and much money is invested by the orders in property of various kinds.

But while these secret orders are a vast power for good in giving aid and comfort to their members, in caring for the sick and ministering to the distressed in mind, body, and estate; while they give vast sums in beneficence and afford wide opportunity for developing the social side of their members, yet they are not an unmixed blessing to the race. The newspaper paragraphers have a sound basis in fact for their threadbare joke about the man who cannot find his latch-key hole when he reaches home after the lodge banquet.

This is not the place to discuss the temperance question or to dwell upon the evils of inebriety, but one should note in a consideration of the vast influence of these fraternal organizations the inimical possibilities of conviviality.

Yet another danger must be considered in estimating the influence of secret societies. One does not trifle with truth in saying that no human gauge can measure the sorrow that comes to some families through the too close attention of husband and father to the lodge-room. There is a strange and powerful attraction for some men in the mysticism of the ritual. There is a peculiar fascination in the unreality of the initiation, an allurements about fine "team" work, a charm of deep potency in the unrestricted, out-of-the-world atmosphere which surrounds the scenes where men are knit together by the closest ties, bound by the most solemn obligations to maintain secrecy as to the events which transpire within their walls.

In the business life of the land instances are not wanting where men have become so infatuated with their secret society work that they have sacrificed position and even financial standing that they might satisfy their craving for greater knowledge of the secret workings of many of the leading organizations. In the commonplace vernacular of the lodge devotees, these were "jiners"—men found in every community who are more eager to be initiated into some new order than to be strengthened in business standing. I think it will not be denied by any fair-minded and conservative member of these organizations that a very large number, throughout the whole United States, suffer in pocket, and not infrequently in business position, in gratifying their desire to belong to, and take all the degrees in, all the secret societies that appeal to their love for novelty and mystery.

There are many elevating and ennobling elements in these fraternities, but the broad, rich acres of man's selfishness are nowhere more carefully fertilized, tended, tilled, and reaped than in the lodge-room. It would all but revolutionize a large section of American Society if the wives and growing-up daughters of the households of the men who belong to these organizations should insist on their right to spend for their own adornment or their own personal pleasure dollar for dollar spent by husband or brother for dues and initiations, for regalia and uniforms and swords, for plumes and banners and banquets. In the great majority of cases the amount of money paid out for the actual expenses of the lodge, as the dues of the order, is not great; it is in the field of personal gratification that the vast unaccounted-for sum is expended. It is probable that, for mere personal gratification, aside from any real or imaginary benefits, the members of the various secret organizations in the United States will spend annually in banquets, railroad and travelling expenses, costly gifts to retiring officers, testimonials, elaborate uniforms, and rare swords not less than two hundred and fifty millions of dollars, and this is allowing but fifty dollars a year as an average for the delightful, but probably wholly unnecessary, expenses connected with the fraternities. It is quite likely the sum is considerably more than this.

But the importance of these fraternal organizations and their tremendous power for good must not be overlooked if we would arrive at a just appreciation of their significance. So numerous,

so powerful, have these orders become, that these closing years of the century might well be called the Golden Age of fraternity. So strong has their hold become upon so many millions of people that the occasions have not been infrequent where other ministers than the priests of the Church of Rome have inveighed against the lodge, and sought to show its pernicious activity in tearing down what the church would build up, or, to put it more mildly, they have protested against the usurping influence of the lodge, its tendency to induce men to accept it as their church, and to make its standards and forms and laws their guide of right conduct.

While the secret society has its peculiar dangers it has great elements of good. Its influence in making thoughtless men reverential, in increasing respect for government by law; its influence in maintaining and promoting allegiance to country, these are important elements of its service. While men with evil tendencies and deformed moral natures are known to be members of fraternal orders, and while, when so known, they are not always as promptly removed as might be wished, yet I think it is but fair to say that cases are exceedingly rare in reputable organizations where men of known badness are admitted. Indeed, one of the greatest powers of the secret fraternal orders of the present day is found in the element of selection. No other organization in the immediate hands of man, and unidentified with religion, so universally sets so high a standard of sobriety, integrity, and honesty; none other, when a seeker for admission appears, so sharply scrutinizes his past, so searchingly investigates his present. The prime essential in all secret organizations of this character is that the initiate shall be a manly man; after that a companionable man.

Nor should it be lost sight of that there is a demand upon these millions of oath-bound men in our land, whom we meet at every turn in the street, who touch elbows with us in business and in society, many of whom are leaders in the laity life of the church, and who are increasingly numerous in the ministerial ranks of the churches, it should not be forgotten that there is a most imperative demand upon the consciences of these men—the acknowledgment of a Supreme Being as ruler over all. To this should be added a rarely lacking, positive, unequivocal, and constant reverence for the Scriptures. Not that any test of re-

ligious belief is exacted, but I think it will be fair both to those who are inside and those who are outside of these organizations to say that the Bible, taken as the most sacred book of the Christian nations, is a work to which peculiar reverence is always given in fraternal organizations. No other organization of men in the world, with the single exception of the church, so universally, so consistently, and so insistently demands that recognition of divine authority which is at once the test and the evidence of the highest type of life.

It may be urged that the hidden power of the fraternal orders is used at times to influence the course of elections; that men who are members of these organizations band themselves too closely together even outside of their society; that they seek to aid a brother before one not bound by the same oath. While we may make some allowance for weaknesses in this regard upon the part of some, I do not think it follows that, because a man is a member of one of these organizations, he stands ready to stultify himself when he enters the polling booth or when he comes into social or commercial contact with those who are not members of his organization.

It is perhaps quite within bounds to say that these orders are increasing in membership in the United States at the rate of between two hundred and fifty and three hundred thousand members annually. Possibly the vast increase during the last twenty-five years may have been an abnormal one, but the indications all point to a constant augmentation of this enormous secret power. Perhaps in no other country in the world could these orders thrive so constantly and at the same time be so free from any suggestion of national censure. If all their secrets were paraded before the eyes of the world, we should find none directed against the best interests of our country.

W. S. HARWOOD.